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Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-02 SS-14 ISO-00 HA-02 DODE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8906
INFO AMCONSUL BELIZE

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 0489

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: GT, MASS, PBOR, BH
SUBJ: TODMAN CONVERSATION WITH DEFENSE MINISTER, JANUARY 23

1. SUMMARY: ACCOMPANIED BY AMBASSADOR, ARA/CEN DIRECTOR MATTHEWS, AND MILGP ACTING CHIEF, TODMAN CALLED ON GENERAL SPIEGELER JANUARY 23. TOPICS DISCUSSED WERE HUMAN RIGHTS, SALE OF F-5 AIRCRAFT, BELIZE AND THE COMING ELECTIONS. SPIEGELER EMPHASIZED FEAR OF CUBA IN BOTH BELIZE AND SUBVERSION CONTEXTS, AND PROMISED THAT WHOEVER WINS ELECTION WILL BE INSTALLED.

2. SPIEGELER OPENED BY REFERRING TO THE PRESENCE OF CUBAN-SUPPORTED SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS IN GUATEMALA; THEY HAD ENTERED CLANDESTINELY FROM MEXICO. MEXICO HAD MADE THE MISTAKE MANY YEARS AGO OF OFFERING SAFE HAVEN AND HELP TO CUBAN-SUPPORTED GROUPS DRIVEN FROM GUATEMALA, AND NOW SOME OF THESE SAME ELEMENTS ARE MAKING TROUBLE FOR MEXICO. IN THIS CONTEXT HE REFERRED TO HISTORIC USG-GOG COOPERATION, AND DWELLED ON THE BAY OF PIGS TRAINING IN GUATEMALA AS CAUSING CASTRO'S SINGULAR AND CONTINUING ENMITY TOWARD GUATEMALA. (PRESIDENT LAUGERUD SOUNDED SIMILAR THEME IN HIS MEETING WITH TODMAN - SEPTEL.)
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3. HE MOVED FROM THERE TO HUMAN RIGHTS. VIOLATIONS, HE SAID, OCCUR THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. GUATEMALANS ENJOY FREE SPEECH AND PRESS, AND LAUGERUD ADMINISTRATION IS VIRTUALLY UNIQUE IN NOT HAVING INVOKED STATE OF SIEGE. NEVERTHELESS, GUATEMALA IS STILL ACCUSED OF NOT BEING A FREE COUNTRY. THE GOG IS TRYING TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS WHILE CONTAINING

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TERRORISM AND SUBVERSION. YOU CAN TURN THE OTHER CHEEK ONLY SO LONG, HOWEVER.

4. INTRODUCING TOPIC OF ELECTIONS, TODMAN SAID, WE BELIEVED IN FREE ELECTIONS. RESPECT FOR THE RESULT OF THE VOTE WAS VERY IMPORTANT. SPIEGELER RESPONDED THAT THE GOG ALSO BELIEVED IN FREE ELECTIONS. WHILE DEMOCRACY ISN'T ALWAYS THE BEST IMMEDIATE SOLUTION FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, IT IS THE BEST THERE IS (OVER LONG TERM) AND GOG MUST MAINTAIN IT. SPIEGELER SAID HE WOULD DO MAXIMUM NECESSARY TO KEEP A LID ON VIOLENCE ASSOCIATED WITH THE ELECTIONS AND INSURE THAT WHOEVER WON WOULD BE INSTALLED.

3. RAISING THE SUBJECT OF THE F-5 PURCHASE REQUEST, TODMAN APOLOGIZED FOR THE DELAY IN A DECISION AND EMPHASIZED PRESI-DENT CARTER'S POLICY OF NOT INTRODUCING SUPERSONICS. RESPONSE HAD BEEN DELAYED BECAUSE USG WAS STUDYING THE SITUATION VERY CLOSELY IN ORDER TO GIVE GOG EVERY POSSIBLE CHANCE FOR A FAVORABLE DECISION. SPEAKING FRANKLY, HOWEVER, AT THIS POINT HE COULD NOT BE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT A FAVORABLE DECISION. TODMAN PROMISED TO TRY TO OBTAIN A DEFINITIVE DECISION ONE WAY OR THE OTHER UPON HIS RETURN TO WASHINGTON.

6. SPIEGELER SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THE SITUATION AND APPRECIATED THE PROMISE TO SEEK A RAPID DECISION. THE PURCHASE WAS NOT A LARGE ONE, AS WE KNEW, AND IT WAS HIS UNDERSTANDING THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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THE F-5 WAS ONLY SUPERSONIC IN A STEEP DIVE, NOT IN LEVEL FLIGHT. HE ASKED TODMAN TO CONVEY THIS OPINION ON HIS RETURN. ECHOING ARGUMENTS THAT TODMAN HEARD FROM LAUGERUD EARLIER IN DAY (SEPTEL), SPIEGELER NOTED THAT HONDURAS AND EL SALVADOR ALREADY HAVE COMPARABLE AIRCRAFT. GUATEMALA, THE RECOGNIZED LEADER OF CENTRAL AMERICA, FINDS ITSELF AT A DISADVANTAGE IN THIS SITUATION. THE GOG WANTS TO STAY AT LEAST AT THE SAME LEVEL (OF SOPHISTICATION), BUT IT DOES NOT EVEN HAVE AN INTERCEPTOR AT PRESENT. GUATEMALA WOULD BUY AIRCRAFT ELSEWHERE AND OF COURSE PAY MORE IN THE LONG RUN IF F-5 SALE TURNED DOWN BY USG.

7. TODMAN STATED THAT IF THE F-5 REQUEST DOES NOT PROSPER, HE HOPED THAT IT WOULD NOT AFFECT THE GOOD GOG-USG RELATION-SHIPS. SPIEGELER DID NOT INDICATE ANY DISAGREEMENT.

8. ON BELIZE, SPIEGELER SAID GOG WANTED A PEACEFUL NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT, BUT COULD NOT STAND STILL FOR UNILATERAL INDEPENDENCE, WHICH EVENT WOULD FORCE GOG TO GO INTO BELIZE WITH WHATEVER ARMAMENTS IT HAD. PUBLIC PRESSURE, ROOTED IN CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISO MAKING BELIZE INTEGRAL PART OF NATIONAL TERRITORY AND THE PATRIOTISM INCULCATED IN

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GUATEMALANS SINCE CHILDHOOD, MADE CONCESSIONS DIFFICULT.
THE PEOPLE WOULD ASK WHAT AN ARMY IS FOR IF NOT TO DEFEND
THE CONSTITUTION. THE GOG WANTS A SOLUTION SATISFACTORY TO
ALL THREE PARTIES, BUT THE UK HAS TO UNDERSTAND THE GUATEMALAN
POSITION.

9. FOR SPIEGELER, GUARANTEED GUATEMALAN ACCESS TO THE
ATLANTIC WAS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE. THE GOG COULD NOT
PERMIT A SITUATION WHERE THE CONVERGING 200 MILE LIMITS OF
BELIZE AND HONDURAS WOULD BLOCK GUATEMALA'S ACCESS TO THE
CARIBBEAN. HE ALSO EXPRESSED APPREHENSION OF CUBAN INVOLVEMENT
ONCE BELIZE WERE TO GET ITS INDEPENDENCE.

10. SPIEGELER EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT THE GOG IS MAKING
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PROGRESS WITH THE NEGOTIATIONS. HE HOPED THE UK WOULD MAKE
THE ROAD EASIER. BESIDES, IT WOULD BE STUPID TO HAVE TO GO
TO WAR OVER BELIZE, AND THE GOG WOULD TRY TO AVOID AN INVASION.
HE HOPED USG WOULD HELP THE GOG.

11. TODMAN REPLIED THAT USG WILL DO WHATEVER IT CAN, WORKING
WITH BOTH SIDES, TO FACILITATE A PEACEFUL SOLUTION.

12. MEETING ENDED WITH SPIEGELER THANKING TODMAN FOR THE
VISIT AND THE OPEN, FRANK DISCUSSIONS WHICH SHOWED "POSITIVE
COMMUNICATION" BETWEEN BOTH PARTIES.
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